Need to Scrap Sedition Law

What is the issue?

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A law that has come in handy for the nationalists of recent times to suppress even minor dissent is the sedition law.

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What is Sedition law?

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- Drafted by **Thomas Macaulay**, it was introduced in the 1870s, originally to deal with increasing Wahabi activities that posed a challenge to the colonial government.
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- **Section 124a in The Indian Penal Code** makes "words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government" punishable by law, **a fine and a maximum punishment of life imprisonment.**
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- Most of the penal code was retained intact after 1947.
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- Despite demands to scrap it, the law of sedition remains enshrined in our statute book till today.
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What is happening recently?

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- In the last decade, along with many other draconian laws of colonial vintage, the sedition law has become extremely popular with our rulers.
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- Figures of the National Crime Records Bureau reveal that in the two years

preceding the Jawaharlal Nehru University case, there were a total of 77 sedition cases, of which only one resulted in conviction.
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- It is not in rates of conviction but in **the criminalisation of dissent** that the expediency of sedition law rests.
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- But when the **legal process itself becomes the punishment,** the slapping of sedition charges can be considered as an attempt to boss the protesters into submission.
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- The reach of Section 124-A has extended even to faraway places. Ex. an entire village in Kudankulam had sedition cases slapped against it for resisting a nuclear power project.
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- In recent times, **even asking questions is anti-national,** anti-state, anti-Army, anti-India or as one Union Minister commented last year, it is a part of a bad culture.
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What is the need to scrap this law?

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- 15 Muslim men were arrested from Burhanpur, Madhya Pradesh, on sedition charges by the police in June 2017. They were alleged to have cheered for Pakistan in the recent Champions Trophy match.
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- Just a few days later, however, the police dropped the sedition charges as its main witnesses stated they had been forced to give false witness.
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- The need for scrapping the sedition law could never have been more urgent.
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- The urge amongst our present-day rulers is akin to the urge of the colonial administrators i.e., total domination over its citizens.
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- Section 124-A, thus, only serve to give a legal facade to the government’s persecution of voices and movements against oppression by casting them as anti-national.
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Source: The Hindu

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